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## Western Europe Weekly Review

12 July 1978

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CONTENTS

The French Role in Africa . . . . . 1

The active French military role in Zaire, Chad, and the Horn of Africa testifies to President Giscard's determination to pursue a strong policy in defense of French and Western interests in Africa, but a variety of constraints places limits on the French role.



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The French Role in Africa

France, more willing than other Western countries to commit its human and material resources in Africa, is becoming reluctant to take on open-ended unilateral commitments. The danger of military overextension in places like Zaire and Chad, as well as potential domestic political constraints combine to limit the French role.

Since the end of the De Gaulle administration in 1969, the French have been reevaluating African nations--both former French colonies and others--in terms of their economic or political importance and opportunities for increased French influence. A major motive has been to maintain and expand arrangements for raw material supplies and markets for French goods.

The French commitment is strongest in the French-speaking states of northern and western Africa--one-time dependencies of France--where Paris' claim to a sphere of influence bolsters its desire to play an international role beyond that of a West European power. Most of these states have maintained close ties with France through cooperation accords, and President Giscard, like his Gaullist predecessors, seems to feel a personal responsibility not only to help them when they are threatened but to guide and strengthen them politically and militarily. Giscard particularly wishes to keep French commitments toward them credible.

The French are genuinely concerned about Soviet inroads in Africa. In a press conference in mid-June, Giscard hinted that he had recently reiterated French warnings to the USSR that Soviet aggravation of trouble spots in Africa is not compatible with detente. Differences between Paris and Moscow over African policy--

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have been an important factor in a recent cooling in French-Soviet relations.

12 July 1978

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Next 1 Page(s) In Document Exempt

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